

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****H.R. 1401****“Rail and Public Transportation Act of 2007”**

March 13, 2007 (WASHINGTON) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee mark-up on H.R. 1401, the “Rail and Public Transportation Act of 2007”:

“Two days ago marked the third anniversary of the terrorist bombings in Madrid. We learned on that horrible day how terrorists will use the confined space and packed cars of a rail system to inflict maximum damage.

We will be reminded once again how exposed public transportation is to terrorist attacks when we mark the second anniversary this July of the terrorist bombings throughout London’s subway and bus system. Recent attacks in Mumbai and New Delhi have reminded us again and again how much terrorists favor this target.

Yet rail and public transportation security remains a secondary issue to aviation security.

In the last two months this Committee has held numerous hearings focusing on the security needs of our Nation’s rail and mass transit systems. We have heard from industry stakeholders, labor organizations, and federal officials about what is being done to secure these systems and what is left to do.

Glaring shortfalls were revealed, such as a lack of federal funds budgeted for surface transportation, a lack of training for front-line workers, and a lack of standardized risk assessments and security plans that are approved by DHS.

Our Committee has worked very hard to produce a bipartisan bill to address these gaps in security.

I appreciate Subcommittee Chairwoman Jackson-Lee, along with Subcommittee Ranking Member Lungren, for marking up a draft of this bill two weeks ago. I also thank Ranking Member King for working with me to introduce a bill that he could support in the full Committee.

H.R. 1401, the ‘Rail and Public Transportation Security Act of 2007,’ will finally require rail and public transportation systems to complete security plans and vulnerability assessments. Right now these plans are only completed on a voluntary basis. This bill also strengthens intelligence and information sharing

between federal agencies, local authorities, and industry stakeholders to increase their ability to prevent and respond to potential threats.

It will also make risk-based security grants available to rail, transit, and bus systems.

The bill also recognizes a fact too often forgotten: the front-line employees of rail and public transportation systems are our best means of preventing and preparing for a terrorist attack on this mode of transportation. By requiring training and exercises for these employees, and also giving them whistleblower protections so they feel comfortable reporting security risks, this bill finally recognizes the importance of including front-line employees in efforts to security our nation's transportation system.

Thanks to an amendment offered by Representatives Perlmutter and Jackson-Lee, the bill also provides a redress process for employees who are terminated as a result of a background check required or suggested by DHS. Additionally, I am proud that the bill calls increase the number of rail security inspectors to 600 by 2010. There are only about 100 of these inspectors now, and although they are doing a good job, they need more help. Finally, the bill will also make substantial investments in the research and development we need to find new ways to secure rail and public transportation.

My hope is that when this bill becomes law, we will address most of the glaring gaps that currently exist in surface transportation security."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact Dena Graziano or Todd Levett at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://homeland.house.gov>